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ABSTRACT

Contemporary models of school reform acknowledge the principal as the passport to school success and the manager of an increasingly complex organization. This digest asserts that principals benefit from professional development that examines best practices, provides coaching support, encourages risk taking designed to improve student learning, cultivates team relationships, and provides quality time for reflection and renewal. Three different philosophical orientations guide the education and professional development of principals: traditional/scientific management, which exposes the principal to the research base on management and the behavioral sciences; craft, in which principals are trained by other experienced professionals; and reflective inquiry, in which the principal is encouraged to generate knowledge through a process of systematic inquiry. The principals' center model reflects the best of each approach, providing opportunities for principals to explore and reflect on current school and leadership topics. The digest notes that if the education change of the new millennium is to deliver on the promise of a quality education for all children, then a different understanding should guide principals' preparation and professional development. Embracing a social reconstructionist orientation toward principal preparation and development would encourage school leaders to create greater equality and social justice both in schools and in the larger community. (Contains 17 references.) (SM)

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By

Leslie T. Fenwick and Mildred C. Pierce

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Professional Development of Principals

Leslie T. Fenwick and Mildred C. Pierce

The changing role of the principal

Societal changes have stimulated new pressures on schools and those who lead them. Technology, demographic shifts, redefinitions of "family," testing and accountability, decentralization and site-based management, violence, changes in the economy, new court mandates related to desegregation, various legislative initiatives such as school vouchers, and the press to privatize have created a web of conflicting demands and expectations for school principals. These changes have resulted in "a turning of the role of principal 90 degrees from everywhere" (Prestine, 1994, p. 150).

Contemporary models of school reform acknowledge the principal as the passport to school success. The modern principal is no longer the "principal" teacher, but rather the manager of an increasingly complex organization. Principals today are expected to create a team relationship among staff members, acquire and allocate resources, promote teacher development, improve students' performance on standardized tests, and build effective community linkages (Drake and Roe, 2002; Pierce, 2002).

Additionally, principals are supposed to interact with teachers, parents, community members, and students. Strong collaboration and instructional skills have replaced strong bureaucratic skills as important attributes of effective principals (Drake and Roe, 2002; Neufeld, 1997). In many respects, the demands on principals mirror those on teachers who are attempting to become facilitators of children's learning and are rethinking their notions of content, pedagogy, and assessment (Neufeld, 1997). Principals need continuous professional development opportunities to support their efforts toward school improvement and revitalize their commitment to creating and sustaining positive learning communities (Foster, Loving and Shumate, 2000; Evans and Mohr, 1999; Neufeld, 1997).

Models of principal professional development/in-service

Over the years, three different philosophical orientations have guided the education and professional development of school administrators: traditional/scientific management, craft, and reflective inquiry. The traditional model is characteristic of preparation programs at universities. Principals select this model based on their desire to pursue additional coursework in an area of professional interest; to obtain an advanced degree; to renew or upgrade their administrative licensure; or a combination of these objectives (Daresh, 2002; Fenwick and Pierce, 2002).

Traditional model

The traditional model exposes the principal to the research base on management and the behavioral sciences. She or he learns the general principles of administrative behavior and rules that can be followed to ensure organizational effectiveness and efficiency. The participant is often the passive recipient of knowledge and the source of professional knowledge is research generated at universities. Learning activities are institutionally defined and generally not tailored to the specific learning needs of the principal or reflective of his specific school context.

In more recent years, many school districts, professional associations, and other education agencies have created in-service academies and workshops/seminars. These academies and workshop/seminar series often have course delivery systems similar to universities, and thus can be characterized as modern versions of the traditional model. Content is changed periodically, usually on the basis of needs assessments administered to potential academy participants. This approach is distinct from other in-service models because of its short-term duration and because it tends to deal with a narrow range of topics, or highly focused topics (Daresh, 2002). Unlike university-based programs, academies and seminars/workshops are more client-driven. Involvement in these types of learning activities normally comes from a principal's personal motivation and desire to learn and grow professionally, not from a need to meet certification or degree requirements (Daresh, 2002).

Craft model

In the craft model, the principal is trained by other experienced professionals. Here, the principal is the recipient of knowledge from seasoned administrators whom she or he shadows in internships and field experiences. The purpose of shadowing is for the principal-observer to see how another principal interacts with school personnel and the public, deals with problems, and responds to crises. The observer learns another way of handling school concerns. In the craft approach, the source of professional knowledge is the practical wisdom of experienced practitioners and the context for learning is a real school setting (Daresh, 2002; Fenwick and Pierce, 2002).

Reflective inquiry approach

In the reflective inquiry approach to professional development, the principal is encouraged to generate knowledge through a process of systematic inquiry. The focus is to create principals who are able to make informed, reflective and self-critical judgments about their professional practice. Here, principals are active participants in their learning and the source of knowledge is in self-reflection and engagement. The goal is to encourage principals to reflect on their values and beliefs about their roles as school leaders, take risks and explore new skills and concepts, and apply their new knowledge and skills in real school contexts. Networking, mentoring, and reflective reading and writing are key components of this approach (Daresh, 2002; Fenwick and Pierce, 2002).

The use of networking for professional development of principals is based on the belief that collegial support is needed in order to be an effective school leader. Literature (Owens, 2000) on organizational effectiveness indicates that the presence of norms of mutual support and collegiality results in greater leadership longevity and productivity. Networking involves linking principals for the purpose of sharing concerns and effective practices on an ongoing basis. Networks tend to be informal arrangements that emerge when principals seek out colleagues who share similar concerns and potential solutions to problems. However, rather than being periodic social gatherings, true networking is regular engagement in activities that have been deliberately planned by the principals themselves, as a way to encourage collective movement toward enhanced professional performance (Daresh, 2002; Neufeld, 1997; Clift, 1992).

One of the most powerful approaches to professional development is mentoring. A mentor is a professional colleague and critical friend who helps the principal understand professional norms and job expectations, and provides helpful advice about professional challenges and career ascension. More than half of the nation's states require that all beginning principals receive at least a year of mentor support when they assume their first administrative post (Daresh, 2002).

Reading and journaling are fundamental practices in the reflective inquiry approach to professional development. Principals read critical professional leterature as well as other relevant writing (novels, plays;

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poetry). Reading selections grow out of the principal's mentoring and networking experiences and professional and personal interests. The assumption underlying this practice is that reading enlightens the principal about the human condition, leadership, and teaching and learning. In this approach, principals are also encouraged to engage in reflective writing via journaling. Here, journals are records of personal reflections about professional challenges, successes and failures, and "aha" moments. Principals can then share reflections from their journals and about their readings in order to obtain feedback from peers and mentors that will encourage further reflection and shape future action plans.

Professional development programs for principals typically reflect one of the three aforementioned philosophical orientations. In most cases they are an amalgam of all three approaches. One professional development model that reflects the best of each approach is the principals' center.

Principal centers

Just like teachers, principals' professional development must be planned, long-term, embedded in their jobs, focused on student achievement, and supportive of reflective practice. It needs to include opportunities to work, discuss, and solve problems with colleagues (Drake and Roe, 2002). Principal centers were designed to provide practicing and aspiring principals the chance to meet in settings to explore and reflect on current school and leadership topics. Their programs are varied and meet the unique needs of principals through conferences, forums, study groups, workshops, seminars, institutes, and grants to pursue self-designed school based projects. Many of the centers are modeled after The Principals' Center at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, the first of its kind dedicated to the professional development of school leaders. Founded in 1981, the Center is the springhead for 150 principal centers existing today throughout the United States. Many of these centers are connected to the International Network of Principals' Centers, where members are also linked with educators throughout the world.

Connecting principals' professional development to the educational equity agenda and school improvement

According to a policy brief issued by the National Institute on Educational Governance, "preparing current administrators for new modes of leadership will require changes in content and delivery of professional development" (U.S. Department of Education, 1999, p. 10). If the education charge of the new millennium is to deliver on the promise of a quality education for all children, then a different understanding should guide principals' preparation and professional development. In order to truly "leave no child behind" and reduce the racial achievement gap reform efforts should structure schooling as "an opportunity structure" and not as a sorting machine. Toward this end, embracing a social reconstructionist orientation toward principal preparation and professional development would encourage school leaders to create greater equality and social justice both in schools and the larger community (Fenwick and Pierce, 2002).

The goal of the social reconstructionist approach is for the participant to learn strategies for the eradication of structures of inequality such as racism, classism and sexism.

People of color and the poor are systematically undereducated in this country. Leadership can play a powerful role in getting the underserved educated. The new professional development model should center learning activities on a conscious equity agenda. According to Evans and Mohr (1999), "Reinforcing old patterns and hearing speakers who mouth familiar platitudes about the 'effective' principals . . . does not lead to substantive change" (p. 532). When the "real problems of real schools" is defined as improving educational outcomes for the lowest performing students, professional development for principals looks different. How different?

First, those who structure and facilitate professional development programs and opportunities should come from diverse backgrounds. Second, professional development programs should encourage principals to gain at least a conversational level of fluency in the second or third most prominent language spoken by students in the school district in which the principal serves. Third, scholarship by Black, Asian, Hispanic/Latino and other typically marginalized scholars should be a prominent piece of professional development reading and reflection (Fenwick and Pierce, 2002). Fourth, principals should learn the knowledge base and technical skills from practitioners, policymakers and academics who have been successful in resolving educational equity concerns, advancing a social justice agenda, and improving outcomes for underserved children and their communities (Fenwick and Pierce, 2002).

Successful professional development takes time. Principals, just like their teachers, benefit from professional development that examines best practices, provides coaching support, encourages risk-taking designed to improve student learning, cultivates team relationships and provides quality time for reflection and renewal. In the end, principals and teachers should leave these experiences with a renewed sense of faith in the transformative power of schools in children's lives.

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